# ZENOS WAKE

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*Translated by Ashley Lebner*

While reading the comments on "Zeno and the Art of Anthropology," I could not help but associate each with one with the various mythical arrows that I evoked in my essay. Matei Candea's is an arrow I did see coming, as it moves within an intermittent dialogue that we have been having for some time now on the relations between endo- and exo-anthropology. And his comments do hit the target as they deftly connect the two margins or worlds between which anthropology deploys itself—showing, on the one hand, how the connection is precisely what *creates* the two margins (insofar as it tells them apart) and, on the other hand, how it makes the distinction relative (insofar as it makes any distinction indefinitely *iterative*). It does not matter which "way" we move, whether inward or outward, anthropology will always bring us elsewhere. Debbora Battaglia's comment reflexively focuses on the gaps: the gaps that open between the four vignettes in my text (four arrows that do not form a continuous trajectory), the gaps that open between intention and effect (epistemology and politics), between space and time (somewhere and somewhen), and within time itself (past and future). It is as if the gaps, Battaglia suggests, were what make the arrow *dis-locate*, in the double sense of moving forward and hitting an unforeseen target (which includes missing the target altogether). After all, contingency is "just" the meeting of two—but of

course there is always a third—independent causal "trajectories." And finally, there is the vertiginous Roy Wagner's comment, which besides performing a figure-ground reversal of my metaphors, did to my text what the supernatural frog of the Amazonian myth did to the weapon of the inept hunter—broke it down into microreferential bits and, after rubbing on a quintessential, magical unguent, reconstituted it as a powerfully obviational arrow. (Let us imagine obviation as the semiotic infrastructure of calculus.)

Rereading my article, I must confess that I squirmed a little at my impertinence with respect to Richard Rorty. Of the four "formulas" quoted, his is the only one treated in an aggressively critical fashion. I did not choose that particular statement, however, because it is representative of the author's philosophy, or of his political credo, both of which, it is true, do not overly excite me; but this, to coin a phrase, is my problem. Rorty's assertion simply seemed to encapsulate a useful antidefinition of anthropology. As with the other three formulas, this passage was taken out of context.[1] Or better, its original context, for me, was my reading it for the first time in a book that should go unnamed, where it was cited to support certain atrociously ethnocentric positions concerning the "beliefs" of an Amazonian people. Not believing what I read, I went to verify the quotation in the original article, where I discovered that its meaning was somewhat different (in other words, not altogether different). The formula seemed interesting to me, in its radical antirelativism (in one sense), coming from an author normally stigmatized as a relativist (in another sense). Now there's your "comparative relativism" (in yet another sense)!

As for the substance of the three comments on my essay, I thank Matei Candea for observing how the "ontological autodetermination" of the collectives studied by anthropology does not refer to the ontological status of the world's *peoples*, but rather to the *popular* origin of the ontologies we study. In other words, the term refers to the analytical decision not to reduce anthropological alterity to so many epistemological ("cultural") variations surrounding an ontological invariant ("nature") to which the epistemology of the anthropologist would have privileged access. That decision is the only one that is consistent with Wagner's definition, according to which "the purpose of anthropological writing . . . [is] to make subject and object be one and the same thing"—or rather (relying on Wagner's comment once more), to make them *become* one and the same thing.

Candea asks about the means by which endo-anthropology can fertilize exo-anthropology, and his answer is: by constantly questioning the contrast between endo- and exo-, reconceived "not [as] a starting point but an outcome." This is very well put. I would only emphasize that bringing the contrast into question does not imply its cancellation; if an auto-anthropology is, strictly speaking,

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1. Except for Michaux's formula, which is utterly self-(de)contextualized (see the original textual environment).

impossible, this does not make alterity indeterminable in turn, but merely motile or variational—what it always was, de jure. "The line between those visions we *ought* to take seriously and those we ought *not* to is never fixed or self-evident." Very true; again, though, I would merely add that once the line is "procedurally" fixed, the *outcome* or the *outside* (those visions that we ought to take seriously) becomes pretty much self-evident. It is essentially a matter of tactical (procedural) quintessentialism.

I welcome Battaglia's reading of my article "as an invitation to deploy Deleuzean assemblage and Amerindian bricolage" in tandem. Doing so permits our tracing an unexpected rhizomatic line to connect the Deleuzo-Guattarian contrast between minor science and royal (or state) science with the Lévi-Straussian contrast between bricoleur and engineer. That line locates anthropology definitively on the side of its "object" (which side are we on?)—an achievement of which only an authentic minor science is capable. Anthropology is a science of and at the margins of conceptual imagination, a knowledge practice that makes concept (subject) and figure (object) become "one and the same thing." It is the study of bricolage through bricolage.[2]

Battaglia brings to the discussion themes from my previous work on Amerindian perspectivism. Noting its relationship to the current text is astute; the piece indeed "offers a kind of mission statement for 'perspectival multinaturalism'." To me, her idea of a "conversion reversal" seems to be very close to the "controlled asymmetry" that Candea sees in the same text. I also welcome her insightful remarks on the contrast between my tendency to spatialize indigenous perspectivism—reflected in my "Zeno" essay in a metatheoretical emphasis on "somewhere"—and the principally temporal inscription ("somewhen") of other non-Amazonian versions of perspectivism. Battaglia is perfectly aware that this contrast itself is spatial or ethnographic ("what the view is like from somewhere else"), which raises a number of interesting questions.

Finally, what can I say about Wagner's text that I have not already said or has not already been radically obviated by it?[3] No mystery here, seeing that "Zeno and the Art of Anthropology" is replete with allusions to Wagner's *The Invention of Culture*. But his current text brings a wealth of new elements for reflection, which demand time for rumination and space for digression. And, as Wagner has said somewhere, "digression, if not relativity, is the very soul of anthropology." Absolutely.

2. Cf. Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975), 34: "We study culture through culture. . . ." On "figure" vs. "concept," see of course Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Janis Tomlinson and Graham Burchell III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

3. Incidentally, while Coyote the Trickster appears in Wagner's text in the first person, there is another Amerindian character who projects his disquieting shadow on Wagner's comment: Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec "Lord of the Smoking Mirror"—the patron, then, of speculation, "a thing of *smoke* and *mirrors*," as the author reminds us. And as Guilhem Olivier remarked, "the coyote was one of the favourite animal doubles (*nahualli*) of the Lord of the Smoking Mirror." See Olivier, *Mockeries and Metamorphoses of an Aztec God*, trans. Michel Besson (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003), 32.